

Commissioner Stewart Addresses Teen Driving Safety As Prom Season Approaches

Dover, DE—Insurance Commissioner Karen Weldin Stewart suggests that parents set aside time to discuss the importance of safe driving practices, especially in regards to attending prom and related after-parties, as motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year olds in the U.S (1). Safe driving practices are important to enforce year-round but parents can help their teens make better decisions by discussing specific driving guidelines, and the consequences of violating those rules, especially when it comes to attending special events like prom.

Many teen drivers simply lack the experience to recognize and respond to hazardous driving situations and are thus more likely to engage in dangerous practices like speeding and becoming distracted by passengers in their car. Teens are more likely to be in an accident if other teens are present in the vehicle. It's important to set clear limits on how many occupants are allowed in your teen's car.

It should also be noted that under Delaware's Level One Learner's Permit restrictions the law states, *"No passengers other than an adult supervisor and 1 other passenger can be in the vehicle during the entire first 12 months of valid driving authority. However, the passenger restrictions of this paragraph do not apply to immediate members of the driver's family as long as the adult supervisor is in the car."* The law further states, *"During the second 6 month period of unsupervised driving, when a supervisor is not present, only 1 other passenger in addition to the driver can be in the vehicle."*

Commissioner Stewart added, ***“One of the biggest distractions of all is often a driver’s cellphone. Delaware law forbids the use of handheld cellphone use and texting while driving for drivers of all ages. Nationally, 20% of teens and 10% of adults admit that they have extended text message conversations while driving (2). Nobody should text and drive, no matter their age.”*** Young drivers on the Level One Learner’s Permit are forbidden from cellphone use entirely. In 2011, 11 percent of all drivers age 15 to 19 involved in fatal accidents were distracted at the time of crash; 21 percent of those drivers were distracted by their cellphone (3).

In 2011, 32 percent of drivers aged 15 to 20 involved in a fatal automobile crash were drinking (4). In a study by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), it was found that when parents used clear “no use” messages, teens were 80 percent less likely to drink(5). Parents should discuss specific plans for where their teen will be going after the prom and confirm with other adults that alcohol and drug-use will not be allowed in any of those settings. Parents are encouraged to set a curfew as well, and many require that their son or daughter call them before they drive home, or are driven home, to ensure that no drivers have been drinking.

One of the most important, and easy, safety practices to follow is to always use a seatbelt. In 2010, 56% of drivers age 15 to 20 who were killed in car crashes after drinking and driving were not wearing a seat belt(6). Seat belts should always be worn by anyone riding in a vehicle, no matter what.

Commissioner Stewart added, ***“Going to the prom is a fun and exciting occasion for teens, and parents can help make sure that their sons and daughters will make it home safely at the end of the night. Taking just a few minutes to discuss your teen’s after-prom plans, curfew and driving expectations can have a large, positive impact on their decision making process.”***

Parents are encouraged to visit the “Parents Are the Key” website run by the Centers for Disease Control, at www.cdc.gov/parentsarethekey/. This website has a “Parent-Teen Driving Agreement” that you can print out and review with your teen. It’s a great tool for guiding a discussion about safe driving expectations and the consequences of breaking the rules that you put in place.

(1) Source: National Center for Health Statistics

(2) Source: Univ. of Michigan Transportation Research Institute

(3) Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

(4) Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

(5) Source: MADD online survey, September 2013

(6) Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

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